Saint Paul Planning Commission City Hall Conference Center 15 Kellogg Boulevard West

Minutes May 30, 2008

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, May 30, 2008, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

Commissioners Mmes. Faricy, Lu, Morton; Porter, Wencl; and

Present: Messrs. Alton, Barrera, Bellus, Commers, Johnson, Kramer, Margulies, Nelson,

Spaulding, and Ward.

Commissioners Mmes. *Donnelly-Cohen, *Smitten, and Messrs. *Cudahy, *Goodlow, *Gordon,

and *Rosemark.

Absent:

*Excused

Also Present: Larry Soderholm, Planning Administrator; Patricia James, Donna Drummond,

Penelope Simison, Merritt Clapp-Smith, Emily Goodman, and Sonja Butler,

Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

I. Approval of minutes May 16, 2008.

<u>MOTION</u>: Commissioner Ward moved approval of the minutes of May 16, 2008. Commissioner Bellus seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

II. Chair's Announcements

Chair Alton announced that on Sunday June 1, 2008 is Grand Ole Day.

III. Planning Administrator's Announcements

Larry Soderholm reported on planning-related business at the City Council for last week and their agenda for next week.

IV. PUBLIC HEARING: <u>St. Anthony Park/District 12 Plan Summary</u> – Item from the Neighborhood Planning Committee. (*Merritt Clapp-Smith*, 651/266-6547)

Chair Alton announced that today the City of Saint Paul Planning Commission is holding a public hearing on the St. Anthony Park/District 12 Plan Summary and that notice of the public hearing was published in the St. Paul Legal Ledger on May 8, 2008.

Merritt Clapp-Smith, PED staff, presented information about the St. Anthony Park/District 12 Plan Summary. City Staff and District 12 representatives worked to make the Summary's strategies consistent with City policy and the Comprehensive Plan. Inconsistent ideas were still included to give voice to District 12's visions.

City staff and District 12 representatives disagreed regarding inclusion of a copy of the South St. Anthony Park Proposed Land Use map as an attachment to the Summary. City staff recommend against inclusion due to legal concerns and believed the map would be more appropriate as a note following Strategy 1. Staff further suggested that part of S. St. Anthony should be designated as a study area, where final decisions would be worked on after the new citywide Land Use Plan is done and more Central Corridor decisions are in place.

Chair Alton read the rules of procedure for the public hearing.

The following person spoke:

Greg Haley, 2202 Carter Avenue, St. Paul, MN. Former District 12 Plan Steering Committee Chair. Mr. Haley described the effort that went into the creation of the Plan. He highlighted interest in expanding housing, businesses, and transportation. He emphasized the goal of strengthening the connections between the North and South St. Anthony Park residential communities.

Chair Alton asked what District 12's opinion of the future of the railroad.

Mr. Haley said they supported the continued operation of the railroad, but anticipated a reduction in use.

Chair Alton also was concerned if District 12 envisioned Rock Tenn leaving, because the map showed changes in land use for the site.

Mr. Haley stated that District 12 supported Rock Tenn as a viable business. The map was general.

Commissioner Ward asked what industrial property owners thought of the land use changes.

Mr. Haley said they talked with owners about positive consequences following the proposed land use changes.

Commissioner Kramer commented that many of the recommedations are phrased as "wishes" or "requests" of the district council as a means of keeping items in the plan that may be inconsistent with citywide policies. He would like the Neighborhood Planning Committee to try to resolve some of the inconsistencies when it reviews the public hearing comments and makes its recommendations back to the Commission.

<u>MOTION</u>: Commissioner Wencl moved to close the public hearing and refer the matter back to the Neighborhood Planning Committee. Commissioner Kramer seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

V. Zoning Committee

NEW BUSINESS

#08-068-305 Moe Sharifkhani – Change of nonconforming use permit from indoor auto storage to indoor commercial parking, and variances of Sec. 62.106(j) to permit continuance of nonconforming status upon removal of the building, and Sec. 62.106(k) regarding standards and design requirements for accessory off-street parking. 312 Walnut Street, between 7th and Exchange. (*Sarah Zorn*, 651/266-6570)

<u>MOTION</u>: Commissioner Morton moved the Zoning Committee's recommendation to approve the change of nonconforming use permit. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

#08-060-829 Westway Terminal Co. Inc. (Childs Road) – Conditional Use Permit for safety catwalk structure and pre-fab load-out rack located in the Flood Fringe, using an elevation method other than fill. 2225 Childs Road, Terminus Childs Road at Metro Sewer Plant. (*Patricia James*, 651/266-6639)

<u>MOTION</u>: Commissioner Morton moved the Zoning Committee's recommendation to approve the conditional use permit with conditions. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

VI. Discussion of planning issues in Ward 4 – Guest presentation by Councilmember Russ stark with questions and answers.

Councilmember Stark started out talking about the big picture and how we move toward being a great city, with great neighborhoods, with livable communities and remaining economically competitive. He has been participating for almost ten years in the conversation about the future University Avenue Corridor and how that corridor will affect the city. The *Central Corridor Development Strategy* and the station area plans are a critical component for moving forward, not only for Ward 4 but for the whole city. We have in recent decades relied almost exclusively on automobile oriented development; now we need to move toward a period where we will see increasing development densities with more efficient land use and transportation. Light rail is still not a certainty for University Avenue and there will be bumps along the road; but it looks more certain than it ever has, and there is a good chance that construction will start in two years.

But there is still a lot of real work is still ahead of us. It's the slow and steady process of figuring out what this project is going to mean to our community and how we are going to plan and develop around it. A lot of the planning is done, but some tricky issues remain: replacing onstreet parking that will be lost; setting parking standards for new development; green building practices; closer mixing of residential, commercial, and industrial land uses; density and building heights.

Ward 4 also has the issue of rail freight and the growth of intermodal shipping in response to higher oil prices. Warehouses want to be close to the intermodal yard, but they don't have as many jobs per acre as we would like in the City.

There are also neighborhood issues in Ward 4, for example, how to ensure the character of single-family blocks while also providing for the rights of sober house residents, how to prevent the St.

Thomas area from being converted into student rentals, how to negotiate the proposed expansion of Hamline University. And recently, there are advocates in Hamline-Midway for raising chickens in back yards. People want to have hens for eggs and meat and to teach kids more about where food comes from.

Commissioner Porter wanted to know what was going on with the Midway YMCA and keeping them on University Avenue.

Councilmember Stark said that the top priority of the Greater Saint Paul YMCA is to replace that substandard facility with a new building. Their discussions will be about what they can do to make this happen on University Avenue.

Larry Soderholm Planning Administrator asked that Councilmember Stark to comment on the future potential of bicycling as a real form of transportation and what are the prospects of getting a connection to the Midtown Greenway in Minneapolis.

Councilmember Starks stated that in December he left a job at the Midway Transportation Management Organization, where he worked to promote biking, walking and other modes to increase efficiency of movement in Saint Paul. Saint Paul has some good bike trails and bike lanes that lead in the direction of downtown, but then it's hard actually to ride into the downtown. More and more people are biking these days and there is an opportunity for more people to use bicycling as a serious way to get around, maybe not for going to work but for local trips, going to the store and running errands. And of course the other issue is "winter;" winter biking requires better snow clearance for bike lanes and trails. Councilmember Stark introduced his aide Samantha Henningson and said they are actively working with the Minnesota Safety Council and others to improve pedestrian safety on Snelling Avenue, which has the highest traffic volume of all of the city's streets and the most bicycle and pedestrian crashes. There are a lot of people who walk in Saint Paul and they wish it were safer. As the number of walkers grows, their safety also grows. Drivers become more aware of them. There is safety in numbers.

The connection to the Midtown Greenway is at this point is at a pause because of negotiations with the Canadian Pacific Railway about use of their bridge over the Mississippi. The route is planned to cross the river at the railroad bridge and follow that railroad alignment to the Ayd Mill corridor and down to W. Seventh. The trail segment along Ayd Mill is already funded, but not yet in construction. Anything with the railroad is going to take some time, work and negotiation.

VII. Comprehensive Planning Committee

<u>Water Chapter</u> – Release public hearing draft and set public hearing on August 8, 2008. (*Larry Soderholm, 651/266-6575*)

MOTION: Commissioner Morton moved the Committee's recommendation to release the Water Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan for public review and set a public hearing for August 8, 2008. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

Central Corridor decisions and next steps – Brief update. (Donna Drummond, 651/266-6556)

Donna Drummond announced that the Canadian Institute of Planners has awarded the *Central Corridor Development Strategy*, its National Award for Neighborhood Planning for 2008. Ms.

Drummond then gave an update on the Central Corridor. She reminded the Commission that the Metropolitan Council is the agency in charge of design, engineering and construction; and the two cities, two counties, and the University of Minnesota are partners with them. However, it is the appointed Metropolitan Council that makes these final decisions on the project.

In February the Metropolitan Council made some of the major decisions, including selecting Washington Avenue through the East Bank Campus of the University of Minnesota as the preferred alignment. In downtown Saint Paul, the Metropolitan Council decided the alignment would go through the Fourth and Cedar block at a diagonal instead of a 90 degree turn, and that there would be a station in front of Union Depot rather than going behind to the concourse level, which is what the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority preferred. However they decided to locate the maintenance yard just to the east of Union Depot and there is a potential for a future extension of the line to serve the concourse level. Another decision included building three car platforms, because the demand will be there in the future and it makes more sense to do it up front.

The University of Minnesota in February said they could give qualified support to the Washington Avenue alignment, but were concerned about the traffic impacts and whether traffic and LRT can coexist on Washington Avenue if the tunnel is out. The tunnel, which was originally planned through the East Bank Campus, was determined to be too expensive. The project would not qualify for Federal Funding with the tunnel in. So an at-grade alignment was selected.

The project office has been working since February on various mitigation measures to determine how to make the Washington Avenue alignment work. The University indicated they would consider it if Washington was made into a transit mall with LRT and buses only, and all other traffic diverted completely off Washington. There has been a lot of work done on analyzing traffic and the various mitigation measures needed to make that work. The project engineers are confident that it can work. The preliminary engineering was progressing along and then on May 21st the Corridor Management Committee, which is the main advisory committee to the Met Council, had a four hour meeting to debate the Washington Avenue alignment and another alignment that the University of MN has said it prefers, called the Northern Alignment. The consulting firm SRF was hired to analyze this Northern alignment, and the results of that study were presented on May 21st to the Corridor Management Committee. Many issues and problems were identified with the Northern Alignment according to the project office staff, including the fact that it would result in 6,000 fewer riders per day, which is very significant. Other issues include: using railroad right-of-way that is an active railroad line, polluted sites, disruption of some Section 8 housing, rebuilding the Number 9 bridge over the Mississippi River, and the need for additional environmental review, which would delay the project for a year at a minimum. Also in question is whether the Northern Alignment could ever qualify for the Federal funding. Based on this analysis the Corridor Management Committee voted 11-1 (University of Minnesota voting against) to recommend going forward with the Washington Avenue alignment. The project will continue to move ahead with preliminary engineering.

There is another current item of interest, which is a required process called Municipal Consent, on the preliminary engineering plans. The cities and the counties are required to hold hearings on the preliminary engineering plans. The Saint Paul City Council's public hearing is on Wednesday June 4, 2008 at 5:30 p.m. The preliminary engineering plans are posted on the Metropolitan Council's project web site, which is www.centralcorridor.org.

VIII.	Neighborhood Planning Committee Chair Wencl announced the next meeting will be on Wednesday June 4, 2008.	
IX.	Communications Committee	
	No report	
Х.	Task Force Reports	
	No reports	
XI.	Old Business	
	None	
XII.	New Business	
	None	
XIII.	Adjournment	
	Meeting adjourned at 10:13 a.m.	
Recorded and prepared by Sonja Butler, Planning Commission Secretary Planning and Economic Development Department, City of Saint Paul		
Respectfully submitted,		Approved(Date)
Larry Soderholm, AICP Planning Administrator		Marilyn Porter Secretary of the Planning Commission

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